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The situation in the Middle East

Measures to eliminate international terrorism

Letter dated 30 December 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I am writing to draw your attention to the latest act of Palestinian terrorism directed against the citizens of Israel.

At approximately 7.30 p.m. (local time) this past Friday evening, 27 December, two terrorists disguised in Israeli army uniforms and armed with M-16 rifles infiltrated the community of Otniel and opened fire on a religious seminary building located there. At the time, students were gathered in the ground-floor dining hall for the festive and holy Sabbath meal. The two terrorists indiscriminately sprayed the building with gunfire; one managed to enter the kitchen where four defenceless students were preparing a meal. All four were shot and killed at close range. Another 10 Israelis, including six soldiers who responded to the attack, were wounded. The terrorist organization Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ) claimed responsibility for the attack.

In a statement issued from the group's headquarters in Damascus, PIJ secretary-general Ramadan Shallah, who is granted safe harbour and operates freely from the Syrian capital, claimed that the Otniel attack was carried out in retaliation for the death of Hamza Abu-Rub, the leader of Islamic Jihad in the West Bank city of Qabatiyah and one of the most senior operatives in the area. Abu-Rub, who was killed after he attacked with a machine gun and grenades the Israeli soldiers who tried to arrest him, was responsible for scores of terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, including the bombing at Kibbutz Shaked on 5 November 2001, which wounded three Israelis, the suicide attack at Umm el-Fahm on 18 September 2002, which killed two Israelis (an incident referred to in my letter dated 19 September 2002 (A/57/419-S/2002/1049)), as well as scores of indiscriminate shooting attacks and ambushes of Israeli civilian vehicles.

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Israel calls upon the Palestinian leadership to cease, once and for all, not only its financial and logistical support for terrorists, but also the moral support that stems from official glorification of their acts. The perception of terrorists as heroes of the Palestinian people is one that has been systematically nurtured in the Palestinian educational system, in the official Palestinian media and in the speeches and statements of Palestinian officials, and has prevented the Palestinian leadership from mounting a concerted campaign against them.

Israel further calls upon the Palestinian leadership to take immediate steps to fulfil its obligations to end violence, terrorism and incitement and to bring terrorist perpetrators to justice in accordance with international law, international humanitarian law and Security Council resolutions. Until the Palestinian leadership is prepared to renounce its strategy of supporting and celebrating acts of terror, Israel will be compelled to take the necessary defensive measures. Terrorist attacks of the kind perpetrated in Otniel will only serve to obstruct the path to peace and reconciliation in the region.

I submit the present letter in follow-up to numerous letters detailing the campaign of Palestinian terrorism that began in September 2000.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter circulated as a document of the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly, under agenda items 36 and 160, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Yehuda **Lancry**
Permanent Representative